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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 023579

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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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SUBJECT: CUBAN 75ER PALACIOS GAINS CONDITIONAL RELEASE

REF: HAVANA 23544

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Buddy Williams for 1.4(d).

[¶1.](#) (S) Summary: The Cuban Government granted conditional probation December 6 to self-described pro-democracy activist Hector Palacios Ruiz, allowing him to head home from the Havana hospital where he says he spent the last three years. Palacios, apparently freed on health grounds, belongs to the organization All United, led by Vladimiro Roca. Palacios, who has heart and circulatory issues, is one of the 75 activists rounded up and jailed in a March 2003 crackdown. His release marks the first time a 75er has been freed on health grounds since Raul Castro gained power on July 31. Fifty-nine 75ers remain behind bars. Palacios may be a State Security agent posing as an activist, and some freed 75ers responded to his release with skepticism. Palacios said he was held in solitary confinement in a cell at Carlos Finlay hospital, but his account could not be corroborated. His release follows those of at least five political detainees, at least two of whom were accused of having ties to State Security. The Raul Castro-led GOC is also having new political opponents detained, including Ahmed Rodriguez Albacia, the brave activist taken into custody December 4 following an opposition youth forum. Suggested press guidance follows in Paragraph 7. End Summary.

[¶2.](#) (C) Hector Palacios Ruiz, sentenced to 25 years on March 31, 2003 for crimes against state security, returned from the penal wing of Carlos Finlay Hospital to his Havana home on December 6. At 10 a.m., he told us by phone, authorities informed him that the Cuban Government had granted him conditional probation. Palacios, a 65-year-old Villa Clara native, told us his health is not good but that he is elated about regaining his freedom. He said he had met with many reporters and invited us to meet sometime soon.

[¶3.](#) (U) Palacios is the first 75er to be freed on health grounds since Raul Castro assumed control of the GOC on July [¶31.](#) 59 of the 75 peaceful activists jailed in the "Black Spring" crackdown remain in prison.

[¶4.](#) (S) Veteran activist and probationed 75er Martha Beatriz Roque of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC), who spent more than one year imprisoned at Finlay, visited Palacios at his home on December 6. Roque said he had gained weight and could stand to lose at least 40 pounds. She noted that Palacios said he had spent the last three years alone in Cell No. 1 at Finlay's penal wing. Roque said: "During my time there, inmates were not allowed to have a cell to themselves." She added: "I don't think he was ever truly

imprisoned." Another APSC member and probationed 75er, Felix Bonne Carcassas, told us he had little doubt that Palacios works for State Security. He told us a story we had heard several times before, about activists bumping into Palacios in the street in eastern Cuba when Palacios was supposed to be in prison.

15. (S) Palacios' release followed the release in recent weeks of five political activists who were held without charge since July 2005. Among these five were Francisco Moure Saladrigas and Ricardo Medina Salabarría; both are somewhat tainted, according to USINT files. Moure was accused of serving as a provocateur at the May 20, 2005 APSC dissident gathering; he stood in the middle of the field and shouted, "Viva George Bush!" (Detractors said the outburst, filmed by hidden GOC videocameras, enabled the regime to "Americanize" the gathering.) Medina, an Orthodox Catholic priest, is affiliated with Palacios. A Catholic priest once told us that Medina was expelled from a seminary for misconduct.

COMMENT

16. (S) We are unable to draw definitive conclusions on the ultimate loyalties of Palacios, Moure and Medina, but the evidence raises a number of red flags and adds to our existing skepticism over the releases. Even if the three were untainted, the release of a small number of political detainees/prisoners does not represent a change in the fundamental nature of the regime. After all, the GOC is still arresting Cubans for their beliefs or peaceful political activities, based on draconian security laws.

17. (SBU/NF) SUGGESTED CONTINGENCY PRESS GUIDANCE:
Q: Any comment on the Cuban Government's release of Hector Palacios, one of the 75ers? Is this a pattern? Any indication that Raul Castro will release more political

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prisoners?

A: Hector Palacios Ruiz has been granted conditional probation. Like other 75ers freed on health grounds, he could be returned to prison at any time. The fact is, Cuba is home to at least 300 documented political prisoners, and thousands of others are behind bars for "dangerousness," in the absence of any crime. The Cuban Government should release all political prisoners and detainees, and allow the Cuban people to form political parties and choose their own leaders.

If pressed:

We would draw your attention to the case of Cuban youth activist Ahmed Rodriguez Albacia. He woke up on December 4 to find dozens of State Security officials descending upon his home. They searched through his belongings for three hours, then hauled him off to a detention center. He has not been charged with any crime. Officials told his mother, Margarita Albacia, that he will spend between one week and one year at the detention center.

WILLIAMS